

# National Endowment for the Arts



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS



THE **BIG  
READ**

 INSTITUTE of  
Museum and Library  
SERVICES

**“Literature is as old  
as speech. It grew  
out of human need  
for it, and it has not  
changed except to  
become more  
needed.”**

—JOHN STEINBECK

from his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, 1962

# Want to have the BIG READ in your community?

Deadline for applications for programs taking place between  
September and December 2008 is **February 12, 2008**.

Application materials will be available on  
the Big Read Web site in mid-October.

**[www.neabigread.org](http://www.neabigread.org)**


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**THE BIG  
READ**



Questions about the application process?  
Contact Christine Taylor at Arts Midwest  
(612) 341-0744 x21 or [christine@artsmidwest.org](mailto:christine@artsmidwest.org)



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<http://archive.org/details/bigread00nati>



# INTRODUCTION

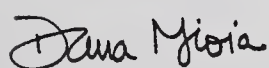
The Big Read is a major initiative from the National Endowment for the Arts designed to revitalize the role of reading in American public culture. The program brings the transformative power of literature into the lives of all citizens to unite communities through reading.

In summer 2006, we announced Mrs. Laura Bush as the honorary chair of the Big Read. The initiative is part of American Masterpieces, a program combining arts presentations with educational programming to introduce Americans to the best of their cultural and artistic legacy. The Big Read features classics of American literature from *The Great Gatsby* to *My Ántonia*, to such contemporary works as *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *Bless Me, Ultima*.

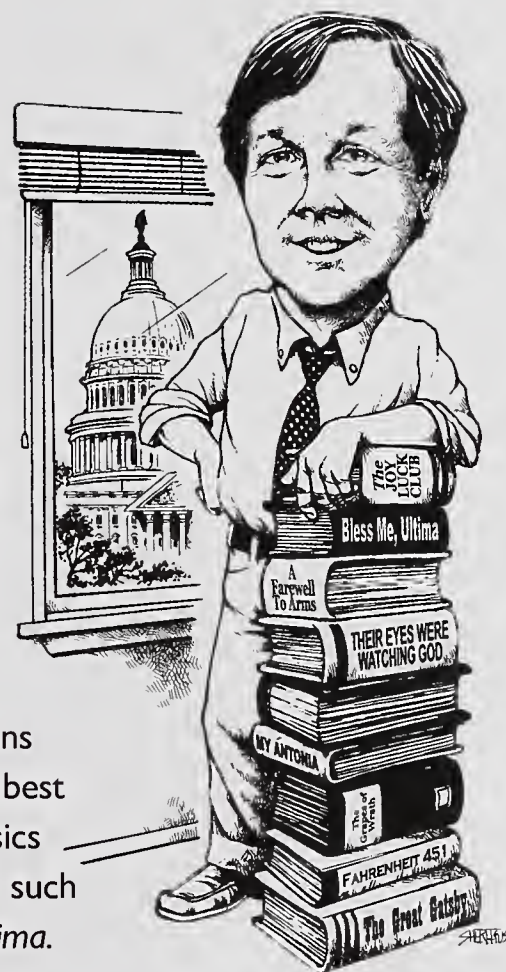
In 2004 the NEA report *Reading at Risk* identified a critical decline in reading among American adults. The Big Read aims to address this issue directly by providing citizens with the opportunity to read and discuss a single book within their communities.

By embarking on the Big Read, you join your fellow citizens in the ambitious enterprise of restoring reading to its rightful place at the heart of American life. The purpose of the Big Read, as with literature itself, is pleasure. Not necessarily an easy pleasure, but a deliciously rich and complex one. A great book enlightens and enchants. It awakens our imagination and enlarges our humanity. It can even offer harrowing insights that mysteriously manage to console and comfort us.

The prospect of an America where only a few people share a love of reading is just too sad to bear. Even if statistics *didn't* show that readers are more active in their own communities and more engaged in their own lives, the act of reading still would be an indispensable part of what makes us fully human. Both for these reasons and to preserve the invaluable legacy of our nation's literature, we at the National Endowment for the Arts invite you to join the Big Read.



Dana Gioia  
Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts



## A REASON FOR THE BIG READ

Drawn from a 2002 study by the Census Bureau, the 2004 NEA report *Reading at Risk* establishes a disheartening fact: *literary reading* (see sidebar) is rapidly declining among American adults. The drop registers in all categories: age, race, gender, and level of education. With a survey sampling of 17,000, this report is one of the most comprehensive polls of American reading habits ever taken. Key findings are:

Less than half (47%) of the American adult population now reads literature.

The ten-year rate of decline in literary reading has accelerated from 5% to 14% since 1992.

All book reading, regardless of genre, has declined at a rate of 7% over the past decade.

Literary reading is declining at all education levels.

The rate of college graduates reading literature has decreased more than 15 percentage points since 1982.

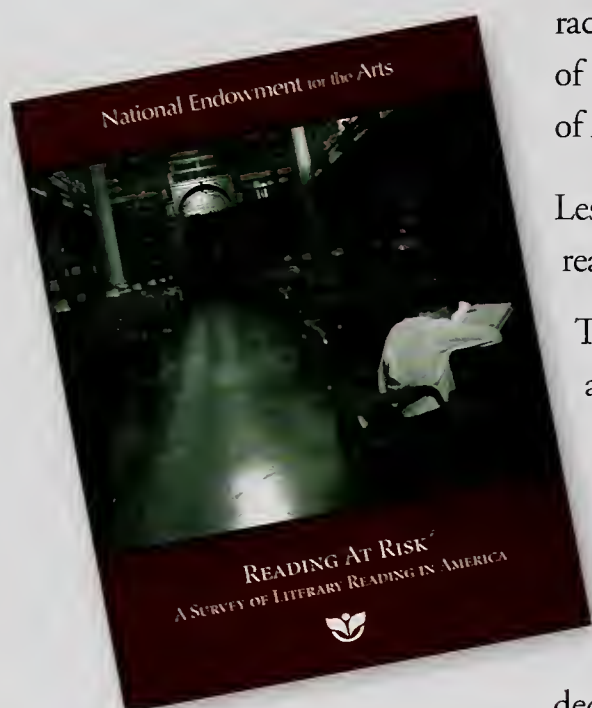
Literary reading is declining among all age groups.

Since 1982, the steepest decline, at 28%, has been among 18-24 year-olds, the youngest age group surveyed.

Just over one-third of men (38%) now read literature.

More than half of all women (55%) still read literature, but that rate has declined by 8 percentage points since 1982.

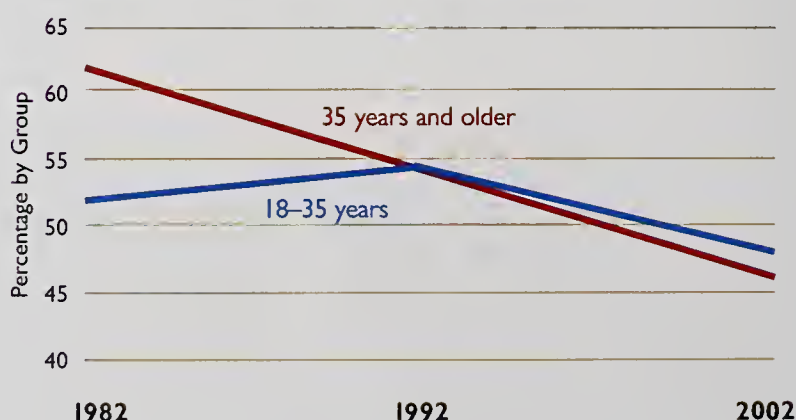
Literary readers are more likely to perform volunteer and charity work (43%) than are non-literary readers (17%).



*Reading at Risk* defined literary reading as novels, short stories, poetry, or drama in any format including the Internet. Everything from romance novels to classical verse counted.

For a complete *Reading at Risk* report, download a PDF at [www.arts.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf](http://www.arts.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf).

### Literary Reading by Young Adults, 1982–2002





## THE BIG READ BASICS

After *Reading at Risk* galvanized a national discussion on the decline in American reading, the idea for the Big Read took shape as a partial solution to this growing problem. To create this program, the National Endowment for the Arts studied both the successes and struggles of reading initiatives across the country. The Arts Endowment, with its partners the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Arts Midwest, put together a plan that focused on the best practices for a sustainable citywide reading program. Next, the Arts Endowment provided the funding and materials necessary for the program's success. The Big Read is designed to help build a nation of active readers and thinkers.

- In communities across the country, the Big Read gives citizens the opportunity to read and discuss a single book.
- Each selected city or town develops its own program of activities related to its chosen novel in collaboration with its partners—libraries, local government officials, arts organizations, media, publishers, booksellers, schools, colleges, and other interested groups—combining the public and private sectors to reach the entire community.
- The Big Read includes an extensive communications plan, using television, radio, Internet, and print outlets.
- In schools throughout each city, the Arts Endowment provides materials—Teacher's Guides, Audio Guides, and Reader's Guides specific to each novel—to teachers interested in incorporating the selected book into their classes.



*Mrs. Laura Bush, Honorary Chair of the Big Read, speaks at the July 20, 2006, Washington, DC, celebration of the Big Read initiative at the Library of Congress.*  
Photo by James Kegley





## THE BIG READ MATERIALS

In addition to a grant award, chosen communities receive a suite of educational materials developed by the National Endowment for the Arts.

These materials include:

- **Reader's Guides** for each book, providing historical context, author biographies, discussion questions, and more;
- **Teacher's Guides** for each novel, with ten lesson plans, including writing assignments, discussion questions, and handouts;
- **Audio Guides** for each book, with commentary from renowned artists, educators, and public figures;
- **Radio programming**, also part of the media plan;
- **Publicity materials**, including posters, banners, and bookmarks;
- **An online organizer's guide** with tips for running a successful Big Read;
- **A comprehensive Web site**, bringing the program, the books, and the materials to a wider audience and serving as a gateway for participating cities to share ideas; and
- **Spanish Reader's Guides** for the following novels: *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck.

*Audio Guides, Reader's Guides, Teacher's Guides, and posters are part of the Big Read materials.*





## THE BIG READ 2006

### The Pilot Phase

In its first year, the Big Read debuted in ten communities across the United States.

- The largest community, Miami, served a total population of 4 million with programming in both Miami-Dade and Broward counties in South Florida. The smallest community, Enterprise, Oregon, reached a total population of 7,000 in that state's Wallowa Valley.
- All ten communities created partnerships with schools, local government officials, and the private sector.
- Communities built programs with events, venues, and materials unique for its region. Miami received a Spanish version of the *Fahrenheit 451* Reader's Guide, and Topeka held events at its *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site.

## THE BIG READ 2007

The Big Read grew 20 times bigger in 2007, serving nearly 200 cities and towns. Cities such as Hartford and St. Louis have now joined the Big Read for the first time. Multiple Oklahoma towns marked the state centennial by reading John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The addition of eight more books in 2007—bringing the Big Read list to 12—drew admiration from communities eager to tailor their choices to the particular needs and curiosities of their residents. The Big Read also found an ally in the electronic media, introducing its own blog at [www.arts.gov/bigreadblog/](http://www.arts.gov/bigreadblog/).

As evaluations flowed back to the NEA from participants nationwide, response was overwhelmingly favorable. Benefits ranged from intangible (The Big Read “brought the community together” was a frequent refrain) to the thrillingly specific, as when Peoria librarians attributed passage of a library referendum—by 72%!—in large part to an election-year Big Read.





## THE READERS CIRCLE

Wendell Berry, poet and novelist

James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress

Matthew Bruccoli, scholar and professor

James Lee Burke, author

Lan Samantha (Sam) Chang, author and professor

Maureen Corrigan, author and book critic

Michael Dirda, book critic

Anne Fadiman, author and essayist

Pico Iyer, journalist and novelist

Mitchell Kaplan, former American Booksellers Association President

Ted Kooser, United States Poet Laureate

Jim Lehrer, journalist and author

Jonathan Lethem, author

Aimee Mann, musician

Lorrie Moore, author

Azar Nafisi, author and professor

Marilyn Nelson, Connecticut state poet laureate

Kathleen Norris, author

P.J. O'Rourke, essayist and humorist

Nancy Pearl, author and librarian

Richard Rodriguez, author

Kevin Starr, historian and former California state librarian

## THE BIG READ LIBRARY

Communities submitting applications due on July 31, 2007, may select from the following list of sixteen novels:

*Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya

*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

*My Ántonia* by Willa Cather

*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

*A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines

*The Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett

*A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

*The Call of the Wild* by Jack London

*The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers

*The Shawl* by Cynthia Ozick

*The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck

*The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan

*The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy

*The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton

Applications due spring 2008 may also consider these additional five titles:

*Washington Square* by Henry James

*A Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula K. Le Guin

*Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain

*Old School* by Tobias Wolff

## How the Big Read Library is Chosen

The National Endowment for the Arts is renowned for the panel process that informs all our grants, including national initiatives such as the Big Read. To select books for the Big Read, the NEA has enlisted a panel of 22 literary experts and laypeople united by a passion for literature. The panelists make recommendations, which are then reviewed by the NEA's Literature staff.

Based on the Readers Circle's choices, the NEA selects a roster of books embodying a broad array of traditions, cultures, and regions. Though we try to offer Big Read communities a diverse choice of reading, the one constant across our list will always be literary excellence.



## HOW TO APPLY FOR 2008

The NEA hopes to award Big Read grants to approximately 400 communities across the United States in 2008.

An organization applying to participate must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or a division of state, local, or tribal government. Eligible applicants include such organizations as literary centers, libraries, museums, colleges and universities, art centers, historical societies, arts councils, tribal governments, humanities councils, literary festivals, and arts organizations. Applicant organizations must partner with a library (if the applicant organization itself is not a library).

Community organizations participating in the Big Read shall develop and produce a well-planned, well-attended, community-wide reading program with innovative, diverse programming and widespread community partnerships. Activities should be approximately one month in duration and will focus on one book from the Big Read Library.

To learn more about the Big Read, visit [www.NEABigRead.org](http://www.NEABigRead.org).

### APPLICATION DEADLINES

- **July 31, 2007:** to run a 4-6 week program between *January and June 2008*
- **Spring 2008:** to run a 4-6 week program between *September and December 2008*

Questions about the application process?

Contact Christine Taylor at Arts Midwest

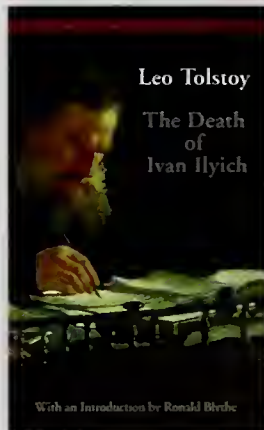
(612) 341-0755 x21 or [christine@artsmidwest.org](mailto:christine@artsmidwest.org)





## INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The Big Read is expanding to include international partnerships that will create meaningful cultural exchanges through the reading of great literature. The first of these international programs will be with Russia.



Communities that select *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (available for programming in spring 2008) may have the opportunity to participate in cultural exchange activities with Russia, in coordination with the NEA.

Applicants considering *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* are encouraged to explore partnerships that involve university International Centers, Slavic language departments, international exchange organizations such as Sister Cities, and the local Russian community (if applicable).

Programming expectations and reporting requirements for *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* are the same as for selections of other Big Read titles.

Partnerships with several other countries are in the planning stages, including Mexico and Egypt. To learn more about these international partnership opportunities, visit [www.NEABigRead.org](http://www.NEABigRead.org).





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The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts—both new and established—bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute's mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development.

Arts Midwest connects people throughout the Midwest and the world to meaningful arts opportunities, sharing creativity, knowledge, and understanding across boundaries. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest's history spans more than 25 years.

Boeing is the world's leading aerospace company and the largest combined manufacturer of commercial jetliners and military aircraft. As a leading contractor to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Boeing works together with its DoD customers to provide U.S. Armed Forces and U.S. allies around the world with fully integrated high-performing systems solutions and support.

Additional support for the Big Read has also been provided by the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation** in partnership with **Community Foundations of America**.

The Big Read in the Pacific Northwest is supported, in part, by a grant from the **Paul G. Allen Family Foundation**, including support for the materials for Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*.

Additional funding for the Big Read is provided by the **Ruffin A. Cooper, Jr., Endowment** and through a bequest made in memory of **Dorothy Lois Beverly**.

### Image Credits

All caricatures by John Sherffius for the Big Read.

Book Cover Credits: *Fahrenheit 451* book cover, used with permission of Del Rey/The Random House Ballantine Publishing Group; *The Great Gatsby* book cover, cover painting by Francis Cugat, used courtesy of Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group; *To Kill a Mockingbird* book cover, photograph by John Montgomery, courtesy of HarperCollins; *Their Eyes Were Watching God* book cover, courtesy of HarperCollins.

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[www.NEABigRead.org](http://www.NEABigRead.org)

**“You don’t have to  
burn books to  
destroy a culture.  
Just get people  
to stop reading  
them.”**

—RAY BRADBURY

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*The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents The Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. The Big Read brings together partners across the country to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment.*

**A great nation deserves great art.**

*The Big Read for military communities is made possible by*

